



**Ohio Senate Finance Committee
Testimony on Substitute House Bill 96
Jim Chakeres, Executive Vice President
The Ohio Poultry Association
June 5, 2025**

Chairman Cirino, Vice-Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee; My name is Jim Chakeres, and I serve as Executive Vice President of the Ohio Poultry Association.

On behalf of Ohio's egg, turkey and chicken farmers that make up the Ohio Poultry Association (OPA), I would like to thank this committee and the Ohio Senate for including additional funding in Substitute House Bill 96 for two items within the Ohio Department of Agriculture's budget aimed at fighting Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), also known as "bird flu." Your investment in this public-private partnership through ODA will help us meet the large testing needs that exist for our members to control and eradicate HPAI on their farms as well as fund highly trained and educated testing personnel at our new, Ohio-based testing facility.

At the request of Chairman Schaffer, I testified before the Senate Agriculture Committee a few months ago to provide an update on the HPAI outbreak in west central Ohio that has impacted all Ohioans. HPAI has wreaked havoc on Ohio's commercial poultry flocks in west Central Ohio resulting in a loss of over 16.2 million egg laying hens, pullets, turkeys and ducks at 74 premises in our state.

While Darke and Mercer counties are the locations of the majority of the infected flocks, we have also seen smaller, isolated minor outbreaks in other areas of Ohio. OPA would like to especially thank Senator Manchester, Chairman Schaffer and members of the Senate for their continued support for our farmers during this trying period. During this crisis and our ongoing state budget process, OPA has truly appreciated the members of this committee and the entire Senate for your continued support during this tremendously difficult time for our industry. Your investment through increased funding within the ODA budget is appreciated and our association strongly believes the return on this investment will not only benefit our farmers but your constituents by ensuring that Ohio farmers can continue to produce safe and nutritious products for all Ohioans.

The HPAI outbreak has been extremely difficult for the farmers, the local communities, and the greater poultry industry. It is truly devastating to deal with a foreign animal disease outbreak. We are grateful for the support of our partners at the Ohio Department of Agriculture, the United States Department of Agriculture, The Ohio State University, and our federal, state and local elected officials and agencies. Ohio's poultry industry is resilient. With the help of the Ohio Senate and the entire Ohio General Assembly, we will move past this and reclaim our spot as a top poultry producing state.

The crisis experienced by my members runs deeper than just financial losses. We need the continued support and outreach of our many partners that help share resources concerning mental health and wellness with the industry and local communities. The emotional toll of bird flu on the farmers and families of the workers is extraordinary.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, OPA and our members in your communities would like to thank you and the entire Senate for this additional funding through ODA in Amended Substitute House Bill 96 to enable our farmers to deal with the devastating impact of HPAI. We respectfully ask that this crucial increase in funding be maintained through the remaining budget process. Please feel free to contact me if you should have any questions regarding this important issue.